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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EUR/PPD, PA/OBS/BS
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PROP](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [OIIP](#) [TX](#)
SUBJECT: HARD-WON 2007 TV CO-OP ON ECOLOGICAL ISSUES A GOLDEN
OPPORTUNITY FOR TURKMEN JOURNALISTS

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: In late June, a three-man crew of Turkmenistan state television journalists completed a high-spirited and enlightening TV CO-Operative Project focused on urban environmental issues. Despite worse-than-usual bureaucratic hurdles prior to departure, the crew's experience in the United States far exceeded expectations. The crew traveled to Washington D.C., New York, Reno and Los Angeles, conducted 18 interviews and shot 12 hours of footage to develop a report for Turkmen state television. Post will continue to support the TV-Coop alumni in their efforts to tailor and place the footage shot on Turkmenistan state television. Embassy's PAO recently reviewed the first 25-minute long documentary for broadcast and found it to be acceptable and even mildly pro-American. END SUMMARY.

MAKING IT HAPPEN: A CHALLENGE IN ITSELF

13. (SBU) In the three years since post's first TV CO-OP project, state media has expressed eagerness to participate in such opportunities while the Ministry of Culture (which oversees state media) has dragged its feet on participants, funding, and other crucial details. The host government delivered the names of this year's team, journalist/editor Enebay Kakabayeva, cameraman Revshen Hadjiyev and interpreter Shohrat Pirmuhammedov, only in the week prior to departure, having shuffled out those with whom post had been communicating for the past year. Nonetheless, the crew eagerly picked up the project envisioned by the previous nominees to examine the public, private, and nonprofit roles in developing environmental policy and practice in U.S. cities. The topic is of particular relevance to Turkmenistan, where urban development equals beautification and environmental protection means planting thousands of non-native trees around Ashgabat -- both policies determined by diktat without a plan for sustainability.

WASHINGTON D.C.

14. (U) The crew began their project June 2 in Washington D.C. with six interviews of representatives of the George C. Marshall Institute, National Environmental Trust, Environmental Protection Agency, Washington D.C. City Hall, and World Resources Institute. The crew also interviewed civil rights activist and speaker Dr. Elbert Ransom, who had visited Turkmenistan in early March as a

Black History Month speaker. (NOTE: Post wishes to reinforce such connections whenever possible, as personal relationships are central to Turkmen culture -- including political culture. END NOTE.) The crew also visited the Foreign Press Center and U.S. Department of State.

NEW YORK CITY

15. (U) Having traveled by train to New York City on June 6, the crew conducted five interviews at a variety of places, including the New York Council on the Environment, Natural Resources Defense Council, Department of Environmental Science of Barnard College, and Green Market Managers Stand. The crew also spent a day sight-seeing.

NEVADA

16. (U) On June 10, the TV crew flew to Reno, Nevada -- which has a sister state partnership with Turkmenistan spearheaded by the Nevada National Guard. Here the crew felt most at home, where the weather and small-town atmosphere are reminiscent of Turkmenistan. Reno's rapid growth rate was another parallel, although the frank public discussion of these issues is not. Nevada National Guard leadership and staff gave two interviews and detailed the active 11-year sister state partnership of which the journalists had previously been unaware. (NOTE: Post tries to drum up state media interest in the partnership activities on a case-by-case basis but the Reno visit will encourage better Turkmen media coverage of such events. END NOTE.) The crew reported they were touched by the Guard's personal investment in the partnership and were surprised to see a Turkmen corner at the NNG headquarters with souvenirs and photographs from Turkmenistan. The crew later met with the Reno-Sparks Visitors and Convention Bureau and visited Lake Tahoe, Lake Pyramid Indian Reservation, Reno TV Station, and the Director of the Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of Nevada for interviews

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focusing on the environment.

17. (U) In Virginia City, PA/OBS/BS Bill McGuire encouraged the crew to take interviews on the street and in shops with local residents, who spoke openly about the city's issues. Following lunch in Carson City, at local watering hole "Hattie's," the crew decided to do a feature on the restaurant where the manager and customers welcomed them as visitors from Turkmenistan and gave their greetings for eventual airing on Turkmenistan television. The crew also met with local environmental activists and finished the day with a dinner and home stay with two local musicians, who compose "environmentally-friendly" music for hospitals. The crew noted the warmth of their hosts and were surprised by the family's -- and especially the children's -- high degree of engagement in their community.

LOS ANGELES

18. (U) On June 13, the crew flew to Los Angeles and over three days conducted five interviews at the Eaton Canyon Nature Preserve in Pasadena, Environmental Information Center of Los Angeles, Tree People in Beverly Hills and at public television station KCET of Los Angeles. Among the interviewees was Dr. Gregory Payne, who visited Turkmenistan in early March as a communication and media speaker.

19. (U) The crew returned to Washington D.C. on June 16 and departed the United States June 19.

CREW IMPRESSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

110. (U) Upon their return to Turkmenistan, the crew gave Public Affairs Staff an ecstatic review of their trip. They were impressed by the U.S. government's commitment to environmental issues and surprised at the level of non-state engagement in policy issues there. The home-stay and personal connections they made with interviewees and people on the street enriched the program and broke up a busy schedule of interviews and travel. The crew regretted that they lacked the time to record additional places and themes they know would have appealed to their viewers, but acknowledged

that greater pre-program planning would have mitigated this issue. The crew showered praise on McGuire, whose professionalism and flexibility ensured the program's success under difficult circumstances. The crew urged additional such projects for state media journalists to improve their professional skills and broaden their creative horizons.

FOLLOW-UP

¶11. (U) The Ministry of Culture also appears to be supporting the journalists' efforts to produce a follow-up report for state television -- a very good sign in an environment where exchange alumni have been ostracized by or even fired by their state employers. In mid-August, the crew provided a required transcript and recording of their first installment of two planned reports on environmental issues. The narration of the report is itself a positive sign because it calls on the viewers to draw their own conclusions about environmental issues. After balanced discussion of major U.S. environmental problems, the report ends with a positive message about the concerns and efforts of Americans in protecting the environment. The crew also plans to do a longer, general "Americana"-themed piece featuring the interviewed Americans who had visited Turkmenistan and their small town restaurant coverage in Carson City, Nevada.

¶12. (SBU) COMMENT: The TV CO-OP program and other hands-on exchange and training opportunities are critical for posts such as Turkmenistan. Here, political isolation has given state media more than usual power to craft the public's perceptions of the outside world. Although the host government just reopened a faculty of journalism at a major state university and has stated support for exchange programs, state journalists lack opportunities for professional development, Internet is severely limited, and their work is heavily monitored and censored. The Ministry of Culture's acceptance of and support for this program, and the journalists' positive experiences, will encourage further progress in the media sector. Our special thanks go to PA/OBS/BS George Santulli and Bill McGuire without whose efforts and commitment this project would not have been possible to implement. END COMMENT.

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HOAGLAND